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Edited by KATHLEEN BLISS

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NEWS-LETTER
INDIA
SUPPLEMENT
ASKING in PRAYER
BY
H. A. HODGES

THE GOVERNMENT'S PROPOSALS for the transference of power in India from British to Indian hands were announced in the House of Commons and in India on June 3rd. The text of the proposals was published in the leading daily newspapers. That Mr. Nehru and Mr. Jinnah would accept the main principle of the proposals was known to the Viceroy before his visit to London. By the terms of the announcement two main steps are to be taken. In India the existing constituent assembly will either continue the work of making a constitution or will divide, by the withdrawal of the representatives of those areas which decide not to participate in it, into two assemblies: their work will decide to what authority or authorities power is to be given. At home, legislation will be introduced in the current session to give immediate Dominion status to India, unaffected by whether British India remains one state or becomes two.

NEXT STEPS

The Government's proposals have been accepted by Indian leaders with gravity and without enthusiasm. That was inevitable. Before all of them lies the immediate exacting task of discussing them with their political associates, and beyond that the long and tortuous business of making constitutions, revising boundaries and transferring powers. Parts of the broadcast speeches of the leaders are

worth quoting here, for, no doubt, they were prepared with the greatest care: the indication of mood and feeling is perhaps what counts. "It is with no joy in my heart," said Mr. Nehru, "that I commend these proposals, though I have no doubt in my mind that this is the right course." Mr. Jinnah said, "We must galvanize and concentrate all our energies to see that the transfer of power is effected in a peaceful and orderly manner. It is clear that the plan does not meet in some important respects our point of view, and we cannot say or feel that we are satisfied. . . . I appeal to every community in India, and especially to the Muslims, to maintain peace and harmony." The tone of Sardar Baldev Singh, the Sikh leader, was restrained: "We have closed a dreary chapter. It would be untrue if I were to say that we are altogether happy. The shadow of our differences has thrown its gloom over us. We have let ourselves be rent apart."

IS IT PEACE?

At the back of all these statements lies the knowledge and fear of possible turmoil. All questions of constitutional and administrative change, difficult as they are, pale to insignificance beside the question in every thoughtful Indian's mind "Is it peace?" Unless there can be brought in the next few weeks a lowering of the political temperature, communal rioting by increasing in ferocity and extent may reduce the hopes of Hindustan and Pakistan alike to ashes. It is those very people whose rights have been so hotly defended in debate, namely the minorities of Hindus in Pakistan and of Muslims in Hindustan, whose lives are chiefly in peril from communal rioting. Even those who belong to the community which gets its political demands can and will lose property, life and all, unless with political settlement peace and order return.

Communal rioting fills with monotonous frequency a tiny paragraph in every British newspaper and a bare moment in the B.B.C. news bulletin. Every day brings further outbreaks accompanied by murder, stabbing and the burning of shops and houses. Ancient communal rivalries based

upon religious differences are fanned to a flame by political passions and find ready tinder in the terrible conditions of over-crowded cities, and villages sweltering in the tropical heat. When after each succeeding outbreak the police and the troops manage to clear the streets, the battered bodies lying in the gutters are never those of priests or political leaders : they are mostly those of the poor who have little to lose but their lives and whose lives are counted so very cheap.

It is all too easy for us in Britain who have never known communal rioting of this kind within our borders, to assume an attitude of aloof impatience tinged with blame. We cannot see the villages devastated as though by air raids nor the hospital wards crowded with men, women and even little children who have been lacerated by knives, burned by flaming petrol, crippled, maimed and blinded by hand grenades, nor the wandering terrified people, their relations killed, their homes burned, their living gone. If we could see them it would be the victims of these outrages who would come to mind, and the waste, misery and suffering of " sheep not having a shepherd " would turn our impatience to pity.

THE RELIGIOUS ELEMENT IN COMMUNAL RIOTING

There are many people in this country, in India and elsewhere, who are disposed to say that communal rioting comes from "too much religion" and to think that it will be a mercy when religion is recognized as an exploded myth and loses its hold on Muslim and Hindu alike. Indeed, the risk that communal violence will bring religion itself into disrepute with many who are revolted by present horrors is not inconsiderable. That the religious wars in Europe made a substantial contribution to the rise of secularism is beyond doubt.

Mr. Gandhi, as one might expect, takes a different view.

" If religion dies," he writes,[1] " then India dies. To-day the Hindus and the Muslims are clinging to the husk of religion. They have gone mad. But I hope that all this is

[1] In the issue of *Harijan* for May 18th, 1947.

froth, that all the scum has come to the surface, as happens when the waters of two rivers meet. Everything appears muddy on top, but underneath it is crystal clear and calm. The scum goes to the sea of itself and the rivers mingle and flow clear and pure."

The two communities live a different life—different in those things which count for much in ordinary daily living, such as marriage, customs of eating, cleanliness and so on. Such differences between two communities might be due to race, or to economic conditions or to climate: no such differences separate Hindus and Muslims, for most of the Muslims of India are converted Hindus, and they inhabit the same land in much the same poverty. Their societies are defined and separated by the stamp and mould set on personal and social life by the working out of a religious faith into customs and ordinances. It is not so much two *religions* as two close-knit *societies* which have to live together; it is not the saints and mystics of each faith, the men who have most of their particular religion in them, but, as Mr. Gandhi calls them, " the scum " of each religion whose understanding of its real meaning is probably very small, who exhibit this communal fanaticism, seeking justification for violence in an assertion of religious superiority.

It is important also to remember that communal rioting is not confined to India nor to religious communities. It has been one of the scourges of the United States, most marked between men of different race, but involving on some occasions small national and economic groups. The religious element in rioting in the U.S.A. is, if present at all, very small. Wide research undertaken by competent bodies has proved at least one thing, namely, that communal rioting is a psychological and social phenomenon of very great complexity, seldom to be pinned down to any one cause or set of causes and never capable of simple and speedy solution. Is it reasonable, therefore, to suppose that India in her poverty, illiteracy and ignorance should be able to expel from her borders a social disease still not under control in more favoured countries?

INDIAN CONCERN OVER COMMUNAL UNREST

The amount of time on the radio, and space in print, given in this country to Indian affairs is so small that impressions are bound to be distorted. The tale of arson, murder and conflict is almost daily repeated, but almost nothing is said of what Indians themselves think of these horrors in their midst. One of the first acts of Lord Mountbatten as Viceroy was to bring about the joint signature by Mr. Jinnah and Mr. Gandhi on April 15th of an appeal to their communities for the cessation of violence. They are strong words for political leaders to commit themselves to in times of conflict and neither could go back upon them without discredit:

> "We deeply deplore the recent acts of lawlessness and violence that have brought the utmost disgrace on the fair name of India and the greatest misery to innocent people, irrespective of who were the aggressors and who were the victims.
>
> "We denounce for all time the use of force to achieve political ends, and we call upon all the communities of India, to whatever persuasion they may belong, not only to refrain from all acts of violence and disorder, but also to avoid both in speech and writing, any words which might be construed as an incitement to such acts."

The appeal was headlined in all Indian newspapers and made widely known.

A correspondent in India who is in close touch with many Hindus and Muslims in the areas of tension speaks of their anguish of mind as they contemplate the rising flood of violence. Many a clash has been prevented by Hindus and Muslims who have taken speedy action where a situation was beginning to look ugly. Members of one community have on occasion mended the broken houses and nursed and tended the wounds of members of the opposite community.

THE CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN INDIA

Christians in India are not the objects of violence and attack. They stand in a position from which, as they have the strength, they can stretch out a hand to help those who are suffering. They have also the chance to bear witness to

the fact that Christian faith can be strongly held and practised without giving rise to the evils of communalism. A statement by the National Christian Council of India, Burma and Ceylon, issued in November, makes clear the trend of Indian Christian thought at this time. After welcoming all steps taken to further Indian independence the statement, which is signed by all the members of the Council, continues :

> " The Council reiterates the general feeling of Christians that they should seek no exclusive communal privileges. All that they ask is that, in common with all communities, they be granted that religious liberty which is of the essence of a fully democratic state.
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> " Distressed by the unprecedented inter-communal disturbances of these times the Council offers its sincere sympathy to all victims of violence and pledges itself to take all possible steps to bring succour and relief to those in trouble. It will endeavour to organize the Christian forces to bring help and healing to the distressed and rehabilitation to the dispossessed. The Council calls attention to the service that has already been rendered by Christians in Bengal, Bihar and other places. It points to these modest endeavours as a promise of greater service in the future. The Council is confident that Churches and educational institutions, as part of India's life, will respond to any call that may come to them, amidst the tragic happenings of our times, and that they will take all possible steps to bring about mutual understanding and sympathy between communities. The spirit of reprisals that is spreading calls for unreserved condemnation. Desperate remedies, such as the migration of populations, will not meet the situation, and it is for Christian people, not involved in the present trouble, to undertake educative propaganda against communal jealousy and strife and in all possible ways to bring to bear a reconciling influence.
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> " We, as a Council, place our services unreservedly at the disposal of the country and would gladly respond to any call from the country for any service that may be required of us and that we are able to render."

LEAVING INDIA

By 30th June next year the British will have left India. Already arrangements for their withdrawal are in full swing.

The coming twelve months are clearly and obviously momentous in the history of the Indian people. They are also momentous in the history of this country. For an empire to relinquish the control of a vast dominion where it has held rule for nearly 200 years and to do it, if in God's mercy we are able, without strife and bloodshed and without rupture of relationships leaving in its train bitterness and hatred, is a unique event in human history. If it can be done, and at the moment it seems that such a prospect lies within our grasp, it clearly shows that there are bonds between the British and the Indian people which have somehow stood the test of much unimaginative blundering and dilatoriness on the one side and much hot resentment on the other.

Like thousands of other British people, the editor of the News-Letter has travelled many a mile in Indian trains and (most sociable of all institutions in the world) Indian buses, and listened to violent, contorted and ill-informed abuse of the British and all their works, and at the same time to generous, sincere and affectionate tributes to many British men and women living and working in India. Some strain of greatness in both our peoples has been called out by this long association, and all our sin and all our folly have not been enough to break it. There are innumerable people in Britain to-day who think of India with something of a lump in the throat. Somehow or other, the country and the people have enslaved their affections. When Mr. Nehru said, as he did in his broadcast, "We shall seek to build anew our relations with England on a friendly and co-operative basis, forgetting the past which has lain so heavily upon us", many in this country will say Amen.

For those of us who believe in God there are two things to be done. As time goes on, new ways in which service can be rendered to the Indian people will become manifest. As in the political field, so in the Church the relationship between British and Indians will change, as it has been changing, but that Indian Christians will welcome the right

kind of help in the Church's task of teaching, training and healing, is not in question.

The immediate call upon us is for our prayers. Burdens which are humanly insupportable lie upon the Viceroy and the Indian leaders, a test not so much of sagacity as of character. Lord Mountbatten has brought to a situation exacerbated beyond all belief a simple capacity and willingness to meet Indians and to know them which has made a profound impression. Lady Mountbatten has been ceaseless in her ardour and totally unselfregarding in her courage in visiting the areas of unrest and caring for the wounded and destitute. As she leaves India Great Britain is represented by a man and a woman who embody what is best in the British tradition, and our gratitude to God ought to be great.

To pray for India in a way which has any meaning and content is, in these days, no light or easy undertaking. India has been to this country a great source of wealth, both private and public. The long connection has enriched our trade and enhanced our power. The subtle influence of the possession of such an empire on the social life of this country, on its educational institutions which have been training schools for empire can scarcely be measured. Though we can point to much of good in British rule in India, we cannot intercede for her before the throne of grace except as penitents.

The Supplement by the Professor of Philosophy at Reading University about petitionary prayer, may perhaps help some of our readers in this particular matter as we feel sure that it will interest others in a more general way.

Kathleen Bliss

ASKING IN PRAYER

BY H. A. HODGES

THERE is nothing more fundamental in the Christian life than prayer; and though it is true, as we are so often told, that prayer does not consist entirely of asking God for things, yet it does include a great deal of asking. Petition is a normal Christian activity and an inescapable Christian duty. At the same time it seems to be beset with difficulties; for there is never any lack of people who will ask searching questions about it. Many of the questioners are serious Christians, who find difficulty in understanding what petitionary prayer is, what results it can be expected to produce, or how it can fit into the scheme of Christian living. These are standing questions, and there are always new people asking them, and therefore it is always in season to speak about them.

WHAT IS PETITIONARY PRAYER?

Petitionary prayer is an attempt to influence the course of events by inviting God to take action in ways specified by the petitioner. It is as well to be clear about this, because we sometimes meet a kind of teaching which denies it or slurs it over. Some people talk as if the real value of prayer lay in its invigorating effect upon the mind of the one who prays. Prayer certainly has such an effect. It means setting personal worries in the wider context of the will of God, and that brings them into perspective and makes them easier to control. But this is a by-product of prayer, not its main purpose. Christianity is not a school of mind-culture or applied psychology. It begins where all such schools leave off; for they are concerned to exploit the native powers of the mind, while Christianity is concerned about a life lived in constant intercourse with God.

The Bible is quite explicit about petitionary prayer, and its promises are astonishing. Christ tells a story " to show that people ought always to pray and never weary of it ".

The story is that of the unjust judge who did right not because he cared for right, but because it was the only way to get rid of an importunate petitioner. If by hard plugging you can get results even from a bad man, how much more will persistent prayer be rewarded by a just God. "Ask, and you shall receive." "Whatever you ask of the Father He will give you in my name." "We are able to approach God with confidence, and whatever we ask we obtain from Him." There are only two conditions laid down. One is that prayer shall be offered "in the name of" Christ, or "according to God" as St. Paul puts it. The other is that we shall ask with confidence. "Let him ask in faith, without doubting." "Whenever you pray for anything, believe that you have received it, and it shall be yours."

These two conditions, however, are enough to rule out a great deal of the prayers we actually offer. The first rules out all prayer which is an attempt to harness God's power to ends which are *merely* our own. It allows no prayer which cannot be brought under the formula used by Christ Himself before His passion: "Father, glorify thy name." The second rules out all prayer that is made merely as a matter of habit, or in a vague hope that perhaps it may be some use, or in a desperate attempt to wring concessions from an ungracious and indifferent God. Both therefore mean that there are many things which it is no use asking for, and it may well be that these include most of the things that we are naturally inclined to ask for. We are certainly not given a blank cheque with a guarantee of payment. We are plainly invited to submit to the discipline of learning both what and how to ask. Yet when all this is said it remains true that, according to the Bible, by petitions of the right kind we can obtain things which we should not have obtained without asking. And this is just what many people find hard to understand.

TWO TYPES OF DIFFICULTY

There are two main types of difficulty, one scientific and the other religious. Both start from the idea that prayer is an attempt to "interfere" with the order of things.

The scientific objection says that such interference is contrary to the laws of nature and therefore impossible, and the religious objection says that even if it is possible it is foolish.

The Scientific Difficulty. Prayer is felt to be an attempt to " interfere with the order of nature ". What lies behind this feeling? It is not, I think, a result merely of scientific teaching; it is rooted much more deeply in common experience. To ordinary observation, the course of events seems wholly indifferent to man. It respects neither our convenience nor our moral principles. We all meet with apparently purposeless frustration and pain, and good or bad fortune bears no relation to moral desert. All that the scientific doctrine of nature has done is to take this experience and develop it into a consistent theme. Nature, it is held, has a being and a rhythm of its own, which is not correlated with our needs and aspirations. It is an orderly system. Things happen in it according to laws which we can discover; and it is just because the laws of nature are really unvarying that science is possible.[1] And these laws are internal to nature; that is, they leave no room for influences to play upon it from any source outside space-time. Everything that happens is the result exclusively of natural causes; not necessarily *physical* or *material* causes, for of course the mind is a reality too; but then the mind is also a fact within nature and is subject to laws of its own. The whole is a closed system, self-regulating, in which nothing ever happens which the laws of physics, chemistry, biology, psychology and sociology cannot together fully explain. It is a matter of scientific principle to believe this, and the success of science amply verifies it. If this world is in some way God's work, it is at least clear that He was not thinking primarily of us when He devised it. He established its order for ends that have nothing to do with us, and is not going to tinker with it just because we ask Him to.

[1] Although to-day some scientists are ready to recognize a degree of indeterminacy in the microscopic realm, where the movements of the particular electron are concerned, that is only allowable on the understanding that the contingencies cancel out and yield a rigid system of law on the macroscopic level.

This attitude is based on two mistakes. The first is that it takes science too seriously. The scientific picture of the universe is a product of deliberate abstraction. It is built up by applying certain principles and methods which have proved brilliantly successful in their way; but it has meant leaving out of account everything which cannot be put through that particular mill. Bring back what has been left out, and science is seen to be only a half-truth. Just as physics is not the whole truth about human beings, because there are also the biological and psychological aspects of them to be reckoned with: so all the sciences together are not the whole truth about the universe. And if you go behind science to the common experience of mankind, that is abstract too. At least a Christian can and must recognize this, for he is doing things which others do not do, and is aware of things of which they cannot be aware. It is not true without qualification that the course of events is indifferent to human concerns. It may be indifferent to the concerns of the ordinary man, or of the cultured humanist. But it is not indifferent to the concerns of the Christian. A Christian has different ideas, different aims, different standards of judgment from other people, he lives in a different world and on another plan. He does not regard nature as something fundamentally independent of himself, working solely by its own power and existing in its own right. He believes, with the Bible, that it is God who rains and thunders, it is God who gives light and life, and all the processes of nature are ultimately His working. And God does these things not for their own sake only, not for any purpose that leaves man aside, but precisely for man's benefit, and for His own glory through the blessedness of man. "He did not create the earth for nothing. He formed it to be inhabited," and all creation looks towards man as its crown. Christian experience verifies this. For those who live according to the Christian plan, but for them only, it becomes a matter of experience that "everything works together for good": i.e. for what the Christian counts as good, not for what others may judge to be so. Thus the Christian faces the objector with a fuller experience of life

and a more comprehensive theory than the objector has. It is not the Christian who need give ground.

The second mistake is to suppose that God cannot fulfil our requests without "interfering" with the ordinary course of nature, or in plain English working a miracle. Miracles do happen, of course. That is another matter, and no part of what I am discussing now. The point is that when we ask for things in prayer, we need not ordinarily think we are asking for miracles, and there is no reason to think that we ordinarily get them. It is quite reasonable to suppose that our prayers are fulfilled by the course of nature going on its way according to its usual laws, unhindered and undiverted by any special interposition. How can this be? We shall say that the course of nature is the inevitable consequence, according to natural law, of the initial distribution of energy at the creation of the world; but we shall add that it was so made from the beginning that it would fulfil those petitions, made by human beings living in it, which God willed to have fulfilled. The plain man would probably express this by saying that our prayers were foreseen from the beginning, and provision made even then for their ultimate fulfilment. Of course this way of putting it is inaccurate, because God is not really in time, and cannot properly be said to *fore*see anything. The accurate way to put it would be to say that God, timelessly contemplating the whole range of time from the first day to the last, has chosen to create a universe in which prayers will be made and will find fulfilment according to His purpose. It means that our prayers, being caught up into the timeless knowledge of God, can work backwards in time, and in a manner be present at, and influence, the creation of the world. To anyone who thinks of himself as an insignificant speck in a vast universe, this will of course be incredible. But it is the mark of a Christian that he knows better than to think of himself so.

The Religious Difficulty. But there is another line of argument which runs like this: "What 's the use of asking for things in any case? God already wills to give us every good

thing, and He knows better than we do what *is* good for us. We can't change His will towards us, and if we could and did, it couldn't be a change for the better. It would only mean making His wisdom bow to our ignorance, and to our self-seeking too; for if I get what I want by asking for it, it will probably mean that someone else doesn't get what he wants. Why should I try to be God's favourite in this way? What right have I to do so?"

This sounds very modest and sensible at first hearing—until you examine its implications, and then you see how silly and unchristian it really is. Those who think like this suppose themselves to be taking God's wisdom and goodness seriously. In fact they are doing nothing of the kind. They are misrepresenting the relation between Him and us, ignoring our status as growing children in God's family, degrading us into a set of helpless infants and God into a nurse who has nothing to do but feed us as and when He thinks fit. This is not Christianity. It is a flat rejection of what is central to Christianity. Difficulties like these come not from a peculiarly strong belief in God, but from what amounts on Christian standards to sheer unbelief. I think it often happens because people stick fast in certain phrases about God which they have picked up from the Bible or in Sunday schools, and repeat them with only a vague notion of what they mean, without any imaginative realization of what they are about. They *say* God is the Father, but they don't seem to ask themselves how a family works.

For instance, what is this about God's will being to give us every good thing? As an abstract formula it sounds fine, but it leaves out what is most relevant to our present purpose. It is not true that God wills to give us every good thing *unconditionally*. He wills to give us certain things in answer to requests, as one gives to grown-up children, not to spoon-fed infants. If we ask He will give; if we don't, He will not give. Why? Because He doesn't only want to do things *for* us, He wants to do things *to oblige* us, which is quite a different thing. (At least, it is among real people; but then many "Christians" seem to have the greatest

difficulty in regarding God as a real person at all.) And He wants to give us things in answer to *one another's* requests, so that each of us can become in some degree a channel of His bounty to others. Very natural among real people, one would think. " And what happens when our wishes collide with one another ? " Well, what would naturally happen ? Suppose a family of three or four children of different ages, sexes and character. The family is planning an excursion. Do we say that it is silly for them all to express their wishes because they will probably clash ? Do we call it favouritism when the father decides in accordance with the wishes of one of them ? People who have a reasonable allowance of common sense in human relationships seem to lose it all when God enters the picture. What can it be but that they don't really believe what they profess to believe, that they construct something remote and impersonal and fantastic and think that is God ?

Another thing about the human family—it is a place where the parents make requests of the children as well as the other way round, and in the hither-and-thither of request and fulfilment the intercourse of the family consists. People don't seem to think of God as making requests. They think of Him as legislating, of course, with a lot of Sinaitic thunder and lightning. Or else they think of Him as pouring favours on the just and the unjust as if out of a cornucopia, and that is His universal " love ". And so we might as well be puppets or robots for all the genuine family life that goes on between Him and us. If we realized more how He asks us for things, we might have less inhibition about asking Him for things.

It is true, of course, and most important, that we have to learn what it is right and proper to ask for, and we never wholly learn. The babes in the Faith may pour out in petition every artless desire that stirs in them. That is allowed in infants ; but it is also the fate of infants to find lots of their requests ignored. The old and wise in the Faith sometimes reach a degree of discernment where they see pretty clearly what they must ask for in detail ; they sometimes see that God is wanting them to ask for a particular

thing in order that He may give it. In between the babe in the Faith and the old and wise there is the young adult who has enough sense to see and reject what is infantile, but not enough experience to see what is really called for. In him, no doubt, a certain diffidence about petitionary prayer is normal and healthy, and we ought not to worry over it, even if it keeps him unable to frame specific petitions for a period which may last years. All will be well, provided that what keeps him tongue-tied really is diffidence and not a hidden unbelief. And there is a ready test. In such a case there is one petition which is sure to be in line with God's will, and no one who believes in Him can doubt that it is so: the prayer for the gift of wisdom or discernment. The doubter who really believes at the core will not be able to help making this request, it will pour out from him in disregard of all his doubts about petition in general, and in the appointed time it will find fulfilment and thereby end those doubts.

I am conscious that these remarks merely scratch the surface of a vitally important subject. But since there seems to be a constant interest in this subject among Christian people, it is perhaps worth while to throw in even such a handful of suggestions as this. It is certain that there can be no recovery of life in the Church without a quickening of prayer in all its forms, of which petition is inescapably one; for a Church that is doubtful or hesitant in petitionary prayer is disobeying the clear instructions of her Lord.

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